

“Prayer: Abiding in Christ”

Date: May 18, 2014

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: John 6:35; John 15:5

Occasion: Series on prayer

Theme: Prayer types

I so appreciate the positive feedback you’ve given regarding this series we’re doing on prayer. I sense many of you are really hungry for a deep relationship with the Lord. Prayer is one of the best practices we have to cultivate that relationship.

Our scripture lessons this morning talk to that deep hunger. John 6:35 tells us that Jesus is the bread of life that will satisfy the spiritual hunger inside each one of us. In John 15:5, Jesus tells us to abide in him, so that we can live fruitful lives. To *abide in Christ* is to stay in close contact, to stay in relationship. Prayer helps us.

You know, it’s one thing to say that you believe in God. That’s intellectual knowledge; you know with your head. It’s quite another thing to know with your heart, to be able to *feel* the Lord’s presence.

One of the things I like best about Christianity is that God made God’s Self know-able to us people. In Jesus Christ God has revealed Himself. People can relate to the man, Jesus, a whole lot better than they can relate to God, whose image is hard to paint.

With Jesus, we have an image in our mind. It’s like relating to a person - because we are. Through Jesus, we can have a relationship with God. Well, if you’re in relationship with someone, you talk to that person. You listen to what they have to say. That’s what prayer is.

Simply having knowledge *about* God doesn’t satisfy spiritual hunger. Being in relationship with God does satisfy. Prayer keeps the relationship alive, keeps it from growing stagnant.

But even the best relationships can become stale. If you keep doing the same things, talking about the same things, after a while the relationship can become boring. It happens in our prayer life as well. Has there ever been a time when your prayer life felt dull, or boring, or it felt like God wasn't there, or God wasn't listening?

I think it happens to all of us. When a relationship gets into a rut, it's time to do something different. The same is true in our relationship with God. Maybe we need to try a different type of prayer.

I'd like to share with you a couple different prayer types, and then invite you to try one of them this morning. Some of them won't require a lot of explanation, so I'll just talk about them briefly. But I want to leave time to try one new method.

First, when it seems like your own personal prayers just don't bring you any closer to God, try praying someone else's prayer. I don't mean that you should try to imitate someone else, but try reading some prayers. Pray out of a prayer book and be inspired.

There are some wonderful prayers in our hymnal. The Book of Common Prayer is the prayer book that John Wesley used. You can go online to Cokesbury.com and look for books of prayers. If *your* prayers are boring you, try praying someone else's and see if you don't spark some creative thinking. We can always learn from others.

Second, pray with a partner. Find one person you trust and become prayer-partners. Get together with that person once a week and spend a few minutes talking, but then get down to the business of praying together. Having a prayer partner is an excellent tool to hold yourself accountable, and also to inspire your own prayers. Remember though, no comparing; it's not a competition.

Third, pray with a group. Maybe going one-on-one with another person makes you feel too vulnerable. You may not be ready for that. But what if a small group of people, maybe four to six in number, decided to get together simply for the sake of prayer.

It's not a Bible study. It's not a sharing group – though you may share joys and concerns. The primary focus of this group is to pray together. Prayer groups have re-energized churches, have revitalized the group members, and have led Christians to greater spiritual growth. And, it's Wesleyan. John Wesley loved those small groups.

Fourth, take a walk. Going for an intentional walk in nature can be a wonderful way of reconnecting with the holy. You're not out there trying to identify flowers and birds and wildlife. You're not on a power walk. This is slow, mind-ful walk. Take notice of what you see. Be in awe as you walk. Allow God to speak to you, rather than you doing all the talking.

Fifth – pray while walking a labyrinth. Did you know there is a circular path over at Frontier Park that is a labyrinth? You start on the outside, at a given point and you follow the path until you arrive at the center. Walk as slowly as you can. Sometimes there are dead ends, and you have to back-track.

The symbolism is the spiritual journey that we're all on. Be as quiet as you can, simply listen for the voice of God as you journey to the center of the labyrinth. It has been a very meaningful experience for some people.

Sixth – pray while noticing your breath. It's called the breath prayer. This is the one I want us to practice this morning. It has some wonderful psychological and physical benefits, as well as spiritual.

It can calm you down; it clears your head to think more clearly; it can reduce your heart rate and lower your blood pressure, with practice. It also allows you to listen for God's voice. Ready?

First, get in a comfortable position, preferably with your feet both flat on the ground. Position your hands comfortably, either palms up or palms down on your knees. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath, hold it and exhale. Do it again: deep breath, hold it, exhale.

Now, each time you breathe simply remain aware of how you are breathing. Notice your inhale and your exhale. It doesn't have to be a real deep breath each time, but become aware of, and focus on your breathing. Breathe in, and breathe out. And notice.

Keep breathing: in and out. Breathe from your belly. When you inhale your belly should be expanding, and when you exhale it should be contracting. Breathe in, and breathe out. Stay aware. Breathe in and breathe out. If you need to scratch an itch, do so.

Keep breathing, and noticing your breath. But what do you do with the thoughts that keep coming into your head? We focus on a word or two: For example: "Come, Lord Jesus." Breathe in (say the word *Come*); breathe out (say the words *Lord Jesus*).

Breathe in, breathe out; "Come, Lord Jesus." Notice your breath, and gently say those words in your mind. "Come, Lord Jesus." And we keep doing it, over and over again. Breathe in, breath out. (about 5 minutes total)

How long do you do this? I'd begin with about five minutes, and then lengthen it to 10 minutes, and then go for 20 minutes at a time. Practice and you'll find that you're worried less about doing it right, and you'll notice yourself resting in the arms of God.

When we do the breath prayer, we're not expecting visions from Heaven. We don't expect audible voices from the Almighty. In fact, we let go of all expectations. It's our time to be in God's presence, to allow the fast pace of our society to pass us by. It's our little vacation from stress, and our opportunity to be in the presence of God.

Psalm 46:10 says: "Be still and know that I am God." The breath prayer is one method of becoming still, so that God can make God's presence known.

Relationships need a little variety to keep them fresh and vibrant. Our prayer life keeps us connected to Christ, abiding in Christ to use Jesus' words. And a little variety in our prayer-life keeps that relationship fresh and vibrant as well.

Now, more than simply being a curious, different kind of sermon, I hope that you will take these suggestions and actually do them. We will abide in Christ by staying connected through prayer.

Use the method that suits you best. But practice that method, regularly, and see if your spiritual life doesn't take on a new and special quality. Amen? Amen!